

## PLAINS CREE

during childbirth  
a cree woman knelt  
in a circle of mid  
wives one cut the  
navel cord the  
afterbirth wrapped  
in hide hung in  
the branches the  
cord laced on a  
skin bag worn a  
round the baby's  
skin he was  
not washed but  
dried with moss  
and dry wood  
and placed in a  
hide bag stuffed  
with moss given  
a name if the  
child got sick  
someone came gave  
him a new name

## CREE RITES

at puberty the  
girls stayed a  
lone in a tipi  
4 days with an  
old woman all  
menstruating  
women went out  
into the trees  
the young girls  
chopped wood  
sewed beads on  
a piece of hide  
they ate little  
cried a lot  
scratched her  
head with some  
pointed stick  
many had visions  
on the 4th nite  
the women went  
to the shelter  
prayed piled

up the wood  
pushed it over  
each woman  
carried some  
of the wood  
home then they  
ate and opened  
surprise gifts

## THRU BLUE DUST, NEW MEXICO

### i

all day sorting  
flowers mesquite  
for its black  
dye wild rhubarb  
desert broom for  
toothache datura  
for dreams does  
she hear the other  
women laughing  
remember that thin  
man's tongue  
sorting a pile of  
snake weed brittle  
bush creosote for  
cementing clay  
lily bulbs pears  
lizards run across  
her feet but she  
doesn't look down  
or at any silver  
or water to not  
see the tip of  
her nose cut off  
for being unfaithful

### xx

tularosa basin  
the wind never stops

the lake dries to  
crystal marsh  
white sand waves

southwest wind  
of gypsum  
drifts white dust  
into the dunes

they eat plants  
insects only

those things  
that grow fast

plants with stems  
40 ft long only  
light animals  
the white mice  
make it

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looking for water  
they left the pueblo

moved to frijoles canyon

found a creek that  
flowed all year

green beans  
on the canyon floor they

honey combed the  
cliff  
the walls so soft

even a child could  
dig with his fingers

wove cotton the  
sun on their faces

glazed this clay

until something with a  
huge mouth

moved into  
their houses

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black mesa

pueblo indians fought  
spanish guns  
till they starved

caves with pools  
of cool water

damp mossy slow

women waiting for their  
baby's head  
slick hair  
the black

squatted or sat up  
stones between their teeth

later damp blood  
leaves the placenta  
buried under  
the floor

umbilical cord in  
a safe place in  
the house  
to bring sun  
to both of them

BRISTLE CONE PINES

"It has turned out that  
longevity is a function  
not of size and majesty  
but of poverty and  
struggle."

New York Times, 6/16/74

the oldest living  
stunted and twisted  
clinging to wind  
blasted edges the  
trees like drift  
wood against the  
blue bristle cone  
forest too wild  
even for hawks or  
coyote the pines  
claw timberline  
soil so poor no  
thing else grows  
not even sagebrush  
stones tilt like  
thrown down graves  
wood smooth as skin  
the branches glow  
whipped by 4000  
years of ice 3  
quarters dead  
hanging on to life  
by a narrow strip  
of living bark  
you can count back  
to the year of  
jesus adjusting  
to dry spells to  
cold growing a  
ring of itself to  
protect itself  
like most survivors